

Davide Angelo

Poetry

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About Davide Angelo

Davide Angelo's poems have appeared in Australian and international publications. Several have been shortlisted for prizes, including *Montreal International Poetry Prize*, *Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize*, *Melbourne Poets Union International Poetry Prize*, and *The University of Canberra International Poetry Prize*. He lives in regional Victoria, with his two daughters.

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There's liquid water on Saturn's
moon, plumes vent from its south
pole. We're waiting for somebody
to crawl out onto the reflective
tectonically deranged terrain,
hoping to nail God to dark matter.
Wherever you live, First Peoples'
painted faces search for evidence
of a collective past. In town halls,
hard edged abstractions of sacred
ceremonies hang on whitewashed
walls. Your migration occurs an infinite
number of times. Hordes of lachrymal
ancestors walk from communal fires
to factories. Natives are made
on process lines. Metal ores burn,
metal feeds metal - in overtime to zero
hour - the language of solidarity, brutal
upper hands, and visceral fictions.
There is a restlessness in you. Wrestle
your dialect to the ground. Wake
from the dreaming - of Sicily,
of San Vito, martyr, patron saint
of the ancient port.

Here is the outline of a forest,
the ghost of our Californian Bungalow.
I catch white butterflies in plastic
bags and pin them to a tree (of symbols).
Tell me it's cruel, animals grieve too.
How many silences, how many memories
hide in a butterfly's wing?
It's the third house in the subdivision,
where you improvise and merge
into Colonial farmhouse vernacular
and announce, *I'm going to die here
like an old dog, under the kitchen table.*
We worship at the altar of David
Attenborough, laugh at old ideas, dream
of UFOs and life on other planets. Watch
the replay of the 'incident'. A faceless man
wears black trousers and a white shirt,
holds shopping bags in each hand,
stands before a column of tanks.
He looks like you from behind. Tell me
there's nothing to fear. A powerline
snaps in the windstorm, pours white
electricity into asphalt. Call the fire

* This poem appeared in Cordite Poetry Review: <http://cordite.org.au/content/poetry/suburbia/>

brigade even though there isn't a fire.

I will crack this dream wide
open. I see your ephemeral wonder.
A disembodied voice announces Alpha
Centauri C, the brightest star,
is gravitationally bound to two
other stars, but appears as a single
star to our unaided future eye.
On the East side, plough your farm,
on the west side, the Californian Bungalow
looks like a church, the octagonal spire
drops dead butterflies on me.
The blending of senses - Listen
to the colour, smell the Sun,
taste the viscous wind
through the leaves, formless
shadows of time itself - then a mouthful
of your Mediterranean Sea.
The Californian Bungalow stands
on the frozen edge of ancient
Enceladus, ninth moon of Saturn.
The new suburb sits in the crater,
liquid water beneath the ice, fracturing
with the strain of time
and tides. This is your best year.
You are the traveller, the immigrant
again - full of knowing.

Reading Room †

When you sleep, feel the earth tremble
Lay your hand instinctively on its hip.

Study your hand against the glass, less
Woundable, memory in your palm,

Along the lifeline, shallow pool in a cave
Water clock beneath your feet.

Your thoughts are for others, now is the feeding
Time, devouring of books, movements analogous

To a King Penguin. Don't build a nest, resist
An imposed order, incubate your life on your hand

Where a poem is diagrammed.
Give the world your full face

Your hair the colour of unearthed bone.
Remember a secret tree, a dream of life

The treehouse you built in your sleep
And filled with books.

There's an artist making lanterns
Under low hanging colour temperature

Luminaries that alter between green
Yellow and red. In the Reading Room

The sky is paper, the moon hides in a fold.
Traverse the solid timber angles of spotted

Gum, sit at the edge of the bamboo laminate
And kiln dried hardwood that rises up, a riverbank

Meeting your feet. Along the horizon, hinterland, green
Chairs of uniform width arranged along an arc

Bow your knitted brow, leave the new library, skillfully
Inserted into its new shell with a smile, the colour of a pearl.

Lick the tip of your thumb, start at the memory of your palm
Rub it along the lifeline, wash it clean and out of existence.

† This poem was Highly Commended in the *Ros Spencer Poetry Prize*.

<https://wapoets.com/ros-spencer-prize-winners/2018-ros-spencer-poetry-award/>

I was in love when New York's disintegration splashed its light onto my face and walls. As the hours passed, the first pictures of Osama began to fill the spaces between repetitious murders. My arms were around her soft flesh when the phone screamed like an infant in the first stages of life and need. My head was in the crevice of two pillows and she was in her little corner of the bed which later became a refuge from me – or so it seems to me now.

It was a phone call from my brother that woke us. We were in the third year of our relationship and happily lost. That night we clung to one another as children do when playing hide and seek, waiting to be found in dark hiding places. What I felt that night is strange to me. Now I feel that most of the memories (or are they resemblances?) are not grounded in specific experiences sufficiently any more, and all the pictures of her that flash before me are unreliable – a delusion. When Osama was killed ten years later, I couldn't sleep. I took a book from the shelf. I was still not used to sleeping alone. It was Brian Greene's *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality*; the title only just fit along the spine of the book. I sat up in bed thumbing through its pages, its tangled lines converging, evolving into the other moving, thinning lines. Photographs of us fell out of the book. I tried to read the language of our faces as I lay in bed waiting for sleep. What I knew for certain was that she was foreign when I attempted to sketch her. I traced her edges until she looked familiar, her light and shade in balance. Her mouth opened like she wanted to say something through the light and shade. I bought the book with her from a second-hand bookshop and told her later that night that once upon a time, the universe compressed to the size of a small dot like the one that ends this line.

She was in awe as I was. I wrote a few poems that were inspired by the book which she said left her cold. *The formless and desolate earth comes and then a kiss from above/the mountains rise up and some believe in the body/woken and emerging from the dust/The sculptor takes the block and chisels the luminous form/a body at the mercy of a Renaissance hand/Some believe in this kind God that plucked the mountains from the ground/and in the science or the brave ones in nothing at all/The threads expanding beyond the Universe's convulsions/the tongues locked in the mysterious and beautiful cosmic exchange/The fresh earth is tilled and the ground opens its mouth/when Cain kills Abel and stands over his blood in awe/The universe is still unresolved/east of Eden/where the fugitives are condemned to wander/real love is an artefact of the past and a kiss on the marble lips/has its scientific and other reasons.*

I remember what she said about those poems. I don't even think she was talking about the poems. Even when I attempted to sketch us in my mind, our edges looked cubist, almost vulgar. What she said may not be what she said at all. My words and her words are broken up, formed and then re-formed. I re-assembled. I am re-assembling us until we intersect. We were never avant-garde but neither were we conventional. I think we were speaking to each other from different mouths and in different languages. Isn't that a metaphor for a dying relationship? She said that she felt that most of the poems were not grounded in specific experiences sufficiently, and that, therefore, the language brought to the task of relating the experience seemed too abstract, too clichéd. She told me that she was trying to point to a very basic problem that I did not seem to see. Mostly, that reading our faces, she felt bogged down in a language that was not succeeding in getting at the thing, the idea and emotion that I very obviously thought was important. It was not the idea or emotion that she was devaluing. It was the language that was the problem.

When the first tower collapsed we gasped and I held her hand. The light and dark disintegrated. 'Fuck,' is all I remember us saying to that miserable little screen. All the elements were jumbled up. The pixels stank of burning hair. Then the images re-assembled and as the hours passed, we saw the planes colliding into both towers and their eventual collapse from different viewpoints, from different heights and different distances. I think about how I held her and remember making coffee and chain-smoking. I remember things that didn't happen like making love as the dawn entered the

‡ This poem appeared in Overland Literary Journal <https://overland.org.au/>

room amid the sounds of the earth exploding in our ears. We were briefly in impressionist colour, then we were smudged in charcoal and we became a single atom.

Ten years later, when she was gone, I looked at a photograph of the President and his men and women watching the killing of Osama. I was immediately taken by one person in that room as the images of disintegration painted their faces. The men in the room watched impassively; the President leaned forward expectantly; the others looked defiant and stoic, some had their arms crossed, their eyes fixed like birds of prey. Hillary Clinton (one of two women in the room) held her hand to her mouth; her eyes were soft with a kind of horror and a kind of sorrow – one single image of frailty and humanity. Below the photograph it stated: 'The SEAL then carried out what is known in the military as a "double tap" – shooting him again, probably in the chest, to make certain he was dead.' I couldn't sleep. I stargazed. Osama's hole was empty and full of light and smoke. His lines were obscure, smudged. His body was thrown out to sea. After the swift scouring nothing remained and they began to re-curve the earth and fill all the holes that were made since that night when I loved her.

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Open House §

To tame and cure this trembling house
The owners have lovingly cancelled out the roadway
With whale songs in door hinges, steady Balearic beats
And downtempo deep house soundscapes.
Built in 1950 and meticulously updated by an old friend
Who came to mend a broken affection and smudged
'Unstable elements' with a burning offering of sage
Because surely, someone must have died here.
The house's heart lies at the very end of a long corridor.
The beginning of the universe is buried right under our feet.
If frogs are known as indicator species, take one through
The generous living room as an indicator of future happiness.
We're most vulnerable at both ends of the arrow.
Inside the open fireplace, glass is an unbreakable honeyed mass,
At its most fragile as it spools and cools into form, invisible
Until it cracks against the wings of sparrows.

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§ This poem appeared in Bluenib Literary Magazine.

Mountain at the end of the World **

‘...one of them caught our eye, the one in the centre...heading towards the mountains...’

Werner Herzog, Encounters at the End of the World

The mountain is not indifferent
to our incantations or the slow rumble
of magma that wakes the wilderness' malice.
My eyes are the first in 30,000 years
to see pigment blown over hollow bones
on the cave's face.
Last night I dreamt I carried my own hands.
But why?
The city of gold exists
because we trust our eyes.
There was a time when we were first
spoke the very first word
told the first lie, made the first kill
felt the first wave of remorse
only to forget for the first time.
Who imitated the cicadas first
stole their tymbals, climbed the tree
and made the first drum?
I storyboarded this dream
a jump cut the signal cycle two rhythms
of the traffic light
tick tick tick
and the red hand
on the red man
could be the same hand
making art in blood
and memory.
One of them catches my eye
the one in the centre
heading towards the mountain
to the soundtrack of eagle screams
and leopard growls
and like him, I want to live
between actuality and narrative
– humiliating the landscape.
Beating his own breast
drinking from the opened ground
the first monkey climbs him, claims him
as the mountain.

** This poem appeared in Bluenib Literary Magazine.

Elegy for a Tiler ††

When God is still young and of good hearing. When I ask you how one boat could fit
two of all living things. When sunflower landscapes of Sicily still bloom
the further south you go. When you never see a single sunflower in your aging.
When an illuminated road exists on a map, never incised into rock. When mist, like
a cloud unmaking Etna at dawn, wraps itself around the overpass so it appears unfinished. When a
thousand red shirts envelop the strait of Messina, ceaseless
and certain as a wave. When steel migrant ships beach themselves like whales, in
Alang, India, bloated hulls of rusted scarlet reef. When the migrant ship, *Guglielmo Marconi*,
is sold for scrap, liquefied and reborn as an impossible cantilever bridge. When you make
yourself very small, each portion of you pooling. When we lap at the folds of your body and the
paramedics beat on.
When you prepare us for the mystery between wind and water. When it is necessary to
know where you are. When I imagine birds with feathers so light, they can
only make their nests on the ground. When the Valdaro Lovers and their
enduring Neolithic embrace will always be proof that we are binary, show us how we love when we
are dying. When monologues transcribed on parchments still reach for the higher plane
of meaning-making in their slow violence. When each of the seasons bully their way
across your face. When I rewind thirty-five years.
When your hair is squid ink black. When your perfect eyes are in vitreous lustre, skin
silverpoint, the rest of you, muscle inside glass. When you try to teach me the way of
the floor, the way of the trowel, proper proportions of mortar-making, and levelling.
When you make me the cutter of the isolation sheet before I can become the cutter
of the tile. When I stare into a languorous zoom of mosaic and memory.
When you, dark and hulking over the mousetrap, take the spring-loaded bar back, lock
the latch, and wait for the sound
of the wire to swing down, snapping the mouse's neck. When I dream of
tiled floors, the mist of dawn unmaking the volcano and the bridge.
When you, made of fire clay, lay on your back on a generous bed of Lungomare sand.
When vigil and sleep mean the same thing. When you don't need a priest,
who you call the middle-man, to get between you and your God. When your courage is a
weapon and a lie. When the surgeon with the skilled fingers of a
seamstress, loosens the long thread, picks the garment apart. When Garibaldi and his mille
arrive, wrapped in the hill of Calatafimi, red twilight on their backs.
When comets, the long-haired stars, leap out of the Sea of Sicily in arcs, guarding the house where
you were born and I have never been. When your clean and immaculate feet point
skywards. When I see you, half-way across the bridge, complete, unending.

†† This poem was shortlisted for the Montreal Poetry Prize.
<https://www.montrealpoetryprize.com/2020-competition-1>

Dog Rocks ‡

Near the peak of Mount Alexander, it rains.
It's where the fire stopped, where black outer barks
conceal darker anatomies, hold the mountain,
keep the avalanche intact.
Beyond the crest, the sign reads Causeway.
The voice of the map is passionless, arbitrary.
We sit in silence, two cups filling, searching
for a better way to describe a leaf on the wind.

We're living on the crust of this star.
The oaks have been dying for months,
dying in order to live again and we laugh
because it'll be Easter Sunday soon.
We search for the Dog Rocks, watch the abseilers
in the briefest free-fall, see the peaks of Tarrangower
and the Pyrenees range, talk among the granite boulders
where eucalypt trees have grown in twisted shapes.

Each time you tell me about the old silkworm
farm, I look toward the mountain, feel the weight
of the city we left all those years ago.
The apple groves in rows are pruned, shaped like bowls,
the memory of sunlight penetrates the canopies.
But it's the Oaks we always come to see,
the Valonia Oaks planted in 1900, surrounded
by ropelike strands of younger trees.

‡ This poem appeared in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing.

<https://liveencounters.net/2021/04/22/live-encounters-poetry-writing-australia-new-zealand-may-2021>

This poem was shortlisted for the *Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize*.

Escape joyful strains, a walk-up flat
Shoes strewn on a narrow patch of porch
Outgrowing the blockwork.

One suburb over, emerald haze of north
Follow father's gait, serpentine lines of Monterey
Pines and English elms, a hand-made lake.

The sky is a page of Mediterranean water.
Angle for vision in the bluestone shadow of
Pentridge Prison, screw shoeless feet deep

In the cool Coburg grass, cast lines baited
With bread balls and Hail Marys full of grace
Into the blue-green algal bloom.

Sleeping carp mimic dead leaves. Mud-skinned
Locomotions of tadpoles, heads full of eyes
Outlive each transfiguration, hold the lake

And their children in their mouths. Under the slide
Indecipherable cursive tags, cacophony of vulgar
Alliterations, anatomy and verb.

Home is a gathering of hands loosening the narrative
La mattanza, ritual killings of tuna corralled into nets
Men armed with gaff hooks whisper Gesù, mutilate

The surface of the water. Great aunts unknot Sicilian
Sunlight, pluck snails from tall grasses, crack sea
Urchins open, take living corals to their mouths

§§ **Note:** "Joyful strains" is taken from the lyrics to Peter Dodds McCormick's lyrics to *Advance Australia Fair*, national anthem of Australia.

This poem appeared in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing.

<https://liveencounters.net/2022/03/27/live-encounters-poetry-writing-spring-edition-april-2022/>

Breaking Seasons ***

Rooftops are lit, shadows tremble wet leaves
Until the sun has its way, conjures the water's
Invisible retreat into the cloud. Under the eaves

With all its dark stars, I lay awkwardly on the old couch
Between the dog and his lamb bone, my daughter's
Angel-winged pink pony digging into my back.

The dog's dreaming how high to pile the dirt mound.
I'm lost in eddies of mould, a sleeping rockface
With fingerholes wide enough for climbing.

The medical centre is shaped like our house.
An old dog-eared National Geographic of sorrows
Breaking seasons, a forest before and after it was felled

And the artist who built a wooden ladder that reached
1,650 feet into the Quanzhou sky, only to set it on fire.
Grey-headed flying foxes hang like blossoms

Echolocations forming dark musculatures.
Snails leave their slow silver on the body of the old oak.
The dog's stalking shy skinks baring blue tongues

In bluff warning beneath the back-veranda steps.
If the scarecrow fails again, I'll give him the side-eye
Like a crow, peck at giant worms of air, stride around

The vegetable patch as though the whole world is a narrow ledge.
We re-dress the scarecrow in my flannel shirt and acid-wash jeans
Fatten him with viscera, down feathers of waterbirds and leaves

The colour of scattered sunrises. When she asks why she lives
In two houses, I daydream a wheat field beneath a sky empty
Of crows.

*** **Note:** The title of this poem and the line "sorrows/Breaking seasons" is adapted from William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Act 1 Scene 4 Line 78: "Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours."

This poem appeared in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing.

<https://liveencounters.net/2021/04/22/live-encounters-poetry-writing-australia-new-zealand-may-2021/>

Word of the Year †††

There's an argument going on whether
It was Yeats or Éluard who wrote
"...there is another world in this one".
It's not a stretch to assert the boulevard
Glowed Lorca's silvery swarms or plastic bags
White as moons, ran red lights
As if in some dream. Inside every surface
Quiet by contrast, we planned a lifestyle
On acres, took turns nursing a loaf of bread.
We held hands while hunting for Miro's
Representations of the Catalan people
In sandboxes for subconscious minds.
It'll be years before we know the power
Of the humourless smile.

In the half light, in the half-life, rain falls
And freezes in me and moths want
To live again. In this reconstruction, bones
Of wood and steel hold the sky.
I've never slept so little but so well inhaling
And exhaling against death. And the stars
Are hardly what the kids are interested in.
Today, I ran from a bee no one else could see.
Tomorrow, I'll take my daughters to the beach
Walk across the whiteness of sand that mirrors
So tenderly, the ceaseless currents.
Even whales, before they were whales
Had the temerity to walk into oceans
And into their futures.

††† This poem appeared in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing.

<https://liveencounters.net/2022/03/27/live-encounters-poetry-writing-spring-edition-april-2022/>